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THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE

May 26. About the place, playing with her baby.
May 27. Went to barter with other women at Tarongen, taking the baby with her.
May 28. Worked in the new taro garden.

The records of the girls are similar to those of the women, they search for shell-fish on the reef, or work in the taro garden, or look after some one's baby, with intervals of doing nothing in particular. The boys spend most of their time fishing, or hunting 'possum, or just playing in the bush, or they may help an older man to shape a dug-out canoe.

RECKONING OF TIME

The past of these people is enshrined for them in their numerous myths of origin, handed down from one generation to another, and called *wanisio wa kāna*, 'stories of long ago'. They are concerned with the doings of culture heroes such as Morena, who instituted their clans, and taught them the arts of life, as described in Chapter II. Tales are also told of successful raids led by great fighting men, who are remembered by name for about two generations back, generally given with the comment: 'They used to eat man.' The era before the white man began to count as a factor in native life (some forty years ago) is sometimes referred to as 'the time of fighting'. The present is 'the time of the white man'.

As regards anything more definite than this, it is practically impossible to obtain any real information. The idea of reckoning an interval seems completely foreign to them. When I tried to find out any such thing as how long taro takes to ripen, or how long ago a certain man died, the majority of people would merely gaze at me in puzzled silence, no matter in what form I couched my queries. My most intelligent informant once said, in discussing these matters: 'We people do not know how to count time. We think in our bellies, that's all.' They take up a plant to find how near the taro patch is to being ready for use, they hold ceremonies when they think they have enough food available. A messenger, carrying a branch of areca-nuts, is sent round to the villages that are expected to attend it, and leaves a nut at each, as an indication that it is time to start. In days of old, this signal was also used as a request to join in a fight, either in defence or attack. If they wish to make an appointment to meet at the end of a designated period, say for purposes of barter, one party to the agreement will give

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the other party a length of fibre string with a knot tied in it for each day that is to elapse before the day appointed, keeping a similar string themselves, and each day one knot is cut off the string till all are gone. The knots in such a string are called *kabus*. I was told that sometimes a row of spears is struck into the ground and one removed each morning, but I did not see this done.

There is no division corresponding to our year.[1] The eagerly anticipated time when they can enjoy feasting upon the canarium almond is called 'the time of the almond', roughly from the middle of May to the end of August (the first almonds were brought to the village on May 14). I note that in the SE. Solomons that portion of the year not named after the almond is connected with the annelid *palolo*,[2] but if there is any such nomenclature in the district with which I am acquainted, it has escaped me, neither did I see any *palolo*.

They recognize the lunar month, *dʒiwau* (= moon). Only the more sophisticated natives seemed to use the 'moon' as a measure of time, and a statement that anything lasts for, or will happen in, a given number of moons nearly always turned out to have been a guess. Unfortunately, I neglected to make definite inquiries as to names for the lunar months. No spontaneous mention was made of any such in our discussions on kindred subjects, which indicates that, if used, they are not considered of very great importance.

The absence of any very well-defined 'nature calendar' may be partly accountable for their disregard of times and seasons. They speak of the 'time of rain' (*buey in a pit*), but seem to apply it whenever the weather is wet. Taro is cultivated all the year round, new plants being always put in as others are taken out for eating. The fact that two new gardens were prepared in June (as described in Chap. IX) was due to the forthcoming *watawutʃ* ceremony, for which a specially large quantity would be required.

The only unit of time that really matters is the day. Short intervals, past and future, are distinguished thus:

roman = to-day (e.g. *roman buey kiu*, to-day is the time for work; *buey papo tsubnu*, to-morrow is the time for idling).

[1] It is now beginning to be introduced owing to contact with missionaries and employers of labour, and is called a 'Christmas'. So too with the week, which is called a 'Sunday', no attempt being made to adapt any native word for the purpose, or to express the idea by a circumlocution.

[2] Ivens, 1927, p. 397, also reported from other parts of Melanesia, e.g. New Ireland (Powdermaker, 1933, p. 29), and Fiji (B. Thompson, 1908, p. 324), &c.

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tubuu = to-morrow.
buŋu = day after to-morrow.
buey sawun = in ten days' time.[1]
ibein = yesterday.
saniau = day before yesterday.
buey pusān = the day before that.
buey watʃin = the day before that again, i.e. 4 days ago.

Within the day, time is designated by reference to the sun. The speaker points to the place where the sun will be in the sky at the time indicated. In these latitudes, this varies hardly at all at the same time of day throughout the year. The names of the different parts of the day are as follows:

patsun takas = early dawn (lit. 'the head of the dawn', when the sun is still below the horizon).
subsub = dawn, as it begins to get lighter.
pōtan taputs non = sunrise (lit. 'the sun comes up').
patsun wanu = noon (lit. 'the head of the village'); also expressed by *pōtan to no me egin*, 'the sun has gone on top'.
torēv = afternoon (abbreviation of *pōtan to rēv non*, 'the sun begins to go down').
rūkunon = sunset (abbreviation of *pōtan to rūku non*, 'the sun sets').
bubuŋi = night (= darkness, as opposed to light).
ōmi = night (as opposed to day, *pa ōmi* = by night).

Except for occasional major excitements, such as the preparations for and performance of an important ceremony, and the tension caused by a death, which, however, soon passes, these folk keep the even tenure of their way, living a life full of small but absorbing interests. They certainly enjoy their pleasures—making love, dancing, eating, gossiping, or 'just sitting'. No one, child or adult, is concerned to 'fill each unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run', but a certain amount of more or less arduous labour must be undertaken in order to provide themselves with means of subsistence, and though the rule 'He that will not work, neither shall he eat' permits of some exceptions, there are few who do not pull their weight in the community.

[1] Counting is as follows: (1) *pa'es*, (2) *book*, (3) *kukan*, (4) *tasa*, (5) *tonim*, (6) *tonom*, (7) *tonit*, (8) *tonal*, (9) *tosī*, (10) *sawun*. Some groups do not go beyond five.

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Take portions of the roots of the tree called *wagag* (a small palm resembling an areca-palm, possibly another variety, but the nuts are not normally used for chewing). Scrape bits off these roots, and let the woman chew them with the betel-mixture, taking care to swallow some of it.

It is understood that a woman may be sterile without having taken a contraceptive. In the course of giving genealogies informants would sometimes remark, speaking of a childless marriage: 'This woman was not able to have children.' They clearly make a distinction, in talking about persons known to them, between this state of affairs and one in which 'the woman's belly was fast' because she had taken one of the medicines. There was no suggestion that the fault might lie with the male, provided that he was capable of performing the act of coitus.

In this connexion it may be added that I gathered from Government officials and missionaries with some medical training that there is very little venereal disease in this area. Such information as I received from the natives corroborates this.

PREGNANCY

Pregnancy is suspected after the omission of one menstrual period, unless the woman has been taking one of the numerous medicines (described on p. 269) which are supposed to control or inhibit the flow, in which case she will wait awhile before accepting the fact of pregnancy. They do not keep any tally of the time, and their only means of judging when to expect the birth is by the appearance of the abdomen and breasts.

There is no ceremony such as takes place among the Trobrianders (Malinowski, 1929, p. 184) or the people of New Ireland (Powdermaker, 1933, p. 60), when a woman first discovers that she is pregnant. In the olden days she used to make a belt of a special creeper called *inus*, and to wear hanging from the front of it leaves of a particular plant (*nai'iar*). As every one now wears a loin-cloth, this practice is falling into disuse, though some women wear the belt and the appropriate leaves on the top of the loin-cloth.

CEREMONY FOR PREGNANT WOMAN

Towards the end of the pregnancy a ceremony is performed with the object of ensuring easy delivery. The only estimate of

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with me looking on rather dismayed, but much interested, and offering no objection. They call the stone 'A Pi'. *Pi* means a sore, and they think that any one who touches it will have sores break out on his body, hence, it afterwards transpired, their anxiety about my handling it. As soon as I discovered this, I told them that I had destroyed its evil power by cleaning it, and they were then emboldened to lift it out of the thicket of bush which grew round it and put it into a position where I could photograph it and even to hold it upright while I did so. There proved to be a design on both sides of it (Pl. 77 *a*, *b*). This was recognized by the Petats men who were my companions; they said it was called *gōm*, that the two parts of the pattern belonged together, and that in the olden days they used to cut it on their faces. (I think the word *gōm* simply means a design of any kind, not only this particular pattern.) They had no idea it was there. I took a rubbing of it in case the photograph should be a failure, and the Iltopan native who had brought me and my Petats friends to the spot asked me to make another and give it to him to show to his people, which I did. After I had photographed it I made them put it back into its thicket, but they carefully propped it up against the standing portion and left it so that its pattern was visible from the road. They said that now I had cleaned it they would not be afraid of it any more. As we left, the Iltopan native turned to the stone and said: 'Master, I am coming back presently. You and I belong to the same clan.'

Stone pillar at Tohatchi

On the Government road about half a mile north of the village of Tohatchi, on the east coast of Buka, some four or five miles to the south of the stone pillar just described, there is another, which appears to be unbroken. It stands about 6½ feet high, and is not quite circular in section; its longer diameter measures 12 inches and its shorter 9 inches. The name of the piece of ground on which it stands is Didirowan. It is, however, apparently not in its original position, but was set up by the roadside comparatively recently; owing to the fact that these people do not know how to measure time they could give me no idea how long ago, but it was within living memory. They said also that some boys brought it from Lontis (on the north-west corner of Buka) 'when it was a little stone, about so high (measuring a length of about a foot)', and that it used to be inside their houses; they called it their child and played